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ALLEGIANCES

Note: This is a fanmade story based on Warrior Cats (by Erin Hunter) and is just for recreational purposes.

ThunderClan:

Leader: Oakstar - dark brown tom with a white underbelly

Deputy: Whiteleaf - speckled white tabby she-cat with green eyes

APPRENTICE, Birchpaw (light brown tom)

Medicine Cat:

Aspenlight - very pale brown and white she-cat

APPRENTICE, Lilypaw (gray tabby she-cat)

Warriors:

Foxbramble - ginger tom with white paws

APPRENTICE, Thrushpaw (black and brown tabby tom)

Brindlefeather - dark tortoiseshell she-cat with amber eyes

Redwhisker - long-furred red tabby tom

Dawnbird - ginger and white tabby she-cat

Patchfur - black tom with white patches and yellow eyes

Lavendertail - fluffy gray she-cat with a pinkish pelt

Palmfoot - sandy gray tabby tom with green eyes

Owlbreeze - black tabby she-cat with a brown tail-tip

Stormflight - very dark ginger tabby tom with blue eyes

Fernspot - spotted pale orange she-cat

Queens:

Iceflower - dappled pale gray she-cat with blue eyes (mother of Patchfur's kits, Leapkit, a brown tabby she-kit and Flamekit, an orange tom-kit)

Ashcloud - dark gray tabby she-cat

Elders:

Vinewhisker - thick-furred yellow tabby tom

Amberfoot - tabby and white she-cat with amber eyes

ShadowClan:

Leader: Stripestar - striped gray tom

APPRENTICE, Rowanpaw (brown she-cat)

Deputy: Darkwhisker - smoky dark gray tabby tom

Medicine Cat:

Marshnose - small brown tom with white splotches

Warriors:

Sprucefur - ginger tom with darker feet

APPRENTICE, Strikepaw (tortoiseshell tom)

Hollypelt - black and gray tabby she-cat with blue eyes

APPRENTICE, Rainpaw (gray and white she-cat)

Stretchclaw - lithe calico tom with green eyes

Shellwhisker - black and white tabby tom

Lightwing - white she-cat with amber eyes

Scorchpelt - long-furred orange and gray tom

Pinefoot - dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Cloudhaze - fluffy very pale cream tabby she-cat

Queens:

Clovershine - ginger she-cat with blue eyes (mother of Sprucefur's kits, Blackkit, a black tom-kit, Emberkit, a dark ginger she-kit and Birdkit, a pale ginger and white she-kit)

Elders:

Blizzardwind - dark ginger and black tabby tom with a gray underbelly and amber eyes

Yarrowsplash - mottled dark gray tabby she-cat with yellow eyes

WindClan:

Leader: Ryestar - small brown she-cat with big amber eyes

Deputy: Gorsepelt - dark gray and white tabby tom

Medicine Cat:

Marigoldfur - pale golden tabby she-cat

APPRENTICE, Sandpaw (dark cream tom with white feet)

Warriors:

Branchfur - pale brown tom with yellow eyes

APPRENTICE, Stalkpaw (gray she-cat)

Sorrelsong - silver tabby she-cat white ears, tail tip and paws

Guststorm - black and pale gray tom with green eyes

Mistbreeze - light brown she-cat with darker specks

Crowstrike - black, gray and white tabby tom

Featherfern - dappled ginger tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Hawkdust - dark calico tom with amber eyes

Duskfoot - brown tabby tom with blue eyes

Queens:

Swiftstalk - light gray she-cat with a white underbelly (mother of Gorsepelt's kits, Morningkit, a gray and white she-kit, Sunkit, a light ginger she-kit, Windkit, a dark gray tabby tom-kit and Harekit, a dark brown tom-kit)

Elders:

Brightmouse - elderly yellow and white tabby she-cat

Rabbitwhisker - pale brown tom with paler flecks around his muzzle, blind

RiverClan:

Leader: Troutstar - muscular reddish-brown tom

Deputy: Streamlight - pale silver tabby she-cat with pale blue eyes

APPRENTICE, Flickerpaw (sleek tabby tom)

Medicine Cat:

Lakeleaf - pale tortoiseshell she-cat with dark green eyes

Warriors:

Pikeclaw - dusty dark brown tom

APPRENTICE, Spottedpaw (spotted light gray tabby she-cat)

Lilydawn - mottled orange she-cat

APPRENTICE, Frogpaw (yellow tom)

Volefur - small brown tabby tom with dark brown legs and tail

Shimmernose - glossy-furred black and white tabby she-cat

Quickclaw - black and silver tom with blue eyes

Floatfur - slender light ginger she-cat with yellow eyes

Rapidwater - dark ginger and brown tabby tom

Queens:

Frostripple - dappled tabby and white she-cat with dark blue eyes (mother of Volefur's kits, Dawnkit, a light brown tabby she-kit and Reedkit, a dark brown and white tom-kit)

Elders:

Tanglestream - fluffy black she-cat with amber eyes

Cloudbranch - speckled brown and white tabby tom

Cats Outside the Clans:

Caramel - light brown and ginger tabby she-cat, kittypet

Snowball - plump white tom with amber eyes, kittypet

Willow - light gray she-cat with pale blue eyes, loner

Lark - black and dark gray tabby tom, lives with Willow

Snip - dark orange tom, rogue

Snap - pale orange tabby tom, rogue

NOTE: Will be uploading at least once per week

PROLOGUE:

Oakstar shivered as the cold breeze swept through his fur, His breath coming out in faint misty puffs.

"Oakstar"

The dark brown tom spun around at the mention of his name. He was met with the small gray figure of the previous ThunderClan leader, Flowerstar. Her whiskers twitched disapprovingly at Oakstar, her form flickering slightly like mist caught in wind.

"You have not found the cat yet" Flowerstar hissed, her back arched. "Were our clues not enough for you?"

Annoyance and desperation prickled his pelt.

"I haven't had enough time" Oakstar grumbled, flexing his claws in frustration. "ShadowClan's been causing trouble...I have to protect my clan!"

Flowerstar stepped closer, her paws barely making a sound. "Excuses will not stop what is coming."

Oakstar's ears flattened. "Then give me something clearer! All I've had are fragments—dreams, whispers—nothing solid!"

The air around them seemed to grow colder.

"Find the cat soon" Flowestar mewed simply.

She faced him, her amber eyes glistening with fear and apprehension.

"A great darkness is coming to the clans"

Oakstar recoiled, his body numb with shock.

"W-What do you mean?" he stuttered, stumbling to Flowerstar as

she began to fade away. Her eyes betrayed nothing as she simply stared at him. Then she was gone.

Oakstar woke up with a gasp his pelt bristling. He blinked rapidly, trying to steady his breathing as the echo of her words clung to his mind. He padded out of his den and gazed up at the moon which lit up the velvet night sky.

Oh StarClan, what do I do?

CHAPTER 1

Leapkit bounded eagerly out of the nursery, her littermate, Flamekit, trailing after her.

"Let's visit Lilypaw!" she mewed enthusiastically.

Flamekit nodded in agreement and padded alongside Leapkit as they made their way towards the medicine den. Her paws barely touched the ground as she bounced ahead, her tail flicking with excitement. Leapkit stared in awe at the small piles of different-sized leaves, stems and flowers. *How do medicine cats recognise these from one another?* She thought, her whiskers twitching curiously. *They all look exactly the same!*

"Leapkit! Flamekit!"

Leapkit spun around at the mention of her name, dragging her gaze away from the large collection of herbs.

"Lilypaw!" she purred, brushing pelts with her friend. "How's your first day as an apprentice?"

"Oh, it was wonderful!" Lilypaw mewed, her eyes shining. "I can't wait to become a medicine cat!"

Leapkit purred but felt irritation prick her pelt. When was *she* going to become an apprentice? Lilypaw seemed to sense her hesitation and ran her tail gently across Leapkit's back.

"Don't worry!" Lilypaw meowed reassuringly. "You'll be an apprentice any day now"

Leapkit grumbled, unconvinced. It felt like she and Flamekit had been in the nursery for seasons! *I know Iceflower wants us to stay as kits forever!* Ever since Leapkit's littermate, Frondkit had succumbed to greencough and passed away, their mother, Iceflower had

become more protective towards her remaining kits. Frondkit had been Leapkit's closest companion up to the day she had died.

Leapkit swallowed the lump in her throat, grief settling over her like a moss blanket. *Frondkit will never become an apprentice.* Leapkit snapped out of her thoughts, finding Flamekit looking at her expectantly.

"Well, are we going back to the nursery or not?" Flamekit grumbled, his plumy orange tail swishing impatiently.

Leapkit muttered an apology and bounded off after her brother.

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"Where have you two been?" cried Iceflower, hurrying towards Leapkkit and her littermate.

Leapkit shared an annoyed glance with Flamekit, who rolled his eyes.

"We're *fine*, mother" Flamekit reassured. "We just visited Lilypaw"

Iceflower's pelt sagged with relief, though her tail was still twitching. Ashcloud padded over, resting her tail on Iceflower's shoulder.

"Why don't you get some rest?" The gray tabby mewed gently. "I'll watch over the kits"

Iceflower nodded warily and slowly made her way towards her nest, grief clouding her eyes. *She must still Frondkit.* Leapkit thought sadly.

"This isn't good for her" Ashcloud murmured, her whiskers twitching worriedly. "She'll be returning to her warrior duties soon and the clan can't afford to have a distracted warrior"

Leapkit agreed and changed the subject.

"When are the kits coming?" she mewed excitedly, gesturing to the tabby queen's swollen flank.

"Aspenlight reckons I'll have them within a moon!" Ashcloud purred, her eyes glistening with pride.

Beside Leapkit, Flamekit purred. They were the youngest cats in the clan, but not for much longer!

"Have you decided on names yet?" Flamekit asked eagerly.

Ashcloud blinked thoughtfully, drawing her fluffy gray tail over her paws.

"I have a few in mind, but Palmfoot and I are going to decide together" she exclaimed.

Leapkit nodded and yawned, suddenly exhausted.

"I'm going to go sleep" she declared and settled in the soft moss beside Iceflower.

Leapkit closed her eyes and leaned against her mother's fluffy fur, feeling sleep crash over her like a black wave.

CHAPTER 2

"Leapkit, you have reached the age of six moons, you are ready to become an apprentice. You will now be known as Leappaw" Oakstar meowed.

He paused, letting the words settle across the clearing as the Clan fell quiet.

Leappaw looked over at Flamepaw who was crouched beside his mentor, Owlbreeze, his fur fluffed excitedly.

"Redwhisker" Oakstar gestured to the long-furred tom. "Brindlefeather was your mentor and taught you loyalty to ThunderClan and the importance of the warrior code. Pass on your knowledge and courage to Leappaw"

Redwhisker padded forward, his eyes shining, and touched noses with Leappaw.

"Leappaw! Flamepaw!"

Leappaw could feel herself bursting with pride and delight as her clan's chants rang through the hollow. Nervousness and worry crept through her pelt. Leappaw wasn't a kit anymore, she served her clan now. Redwhisker, who seemed to sense her nervousness, ran his tail gently down her back.

"Don't worry" he purred. "I'll make sure you become the best warrior this clan has ever seen!"

Leappaw nodded, her worries vanishing in an instant.

"Well done youngster!"

She spun around at the familiar voice of her father, Patchfur.

"I couldn't have done it without you" she mumbled happily, nuzzling against her fathers sleek pelt.

Leappaw padded in the direction of the nursery, her mind buzzing with curiosity. Ashcloud had kitted the previous morning and Leappaw couldn't wait to see the clan's newest members.

She stepped in the nursery, immediately spotting Ashcloud suckling three tiny kits. The gray queen weak, her fur matted, but her eyes glittered with happiness.

"A kit no longer huh!" Ashcloud rasped. "You'll make a great warrior"

Leappaw dipped her head respectfully.

"What did you name them?" she asked, indicating to the small bundles that had curled against their mother's belly.

"Well, the beige tabby is Flashkit and the gray she-kit is Softkit" Ashcloud exclaimed, stroking the two kits' fur gently.

"What about the third?" Leappaw asked, gesturing towards a small brown kit.

"Actually, I decided to name her Frondkit" Ashcloud meowed.

Leappaw gasped.

"Frondkit didn't get to live a full life, but this little one will" Ashcloud purred, gazing at the brown tabby kit, her gaze filled with love. "Frondkit deserves to be remembered in the clan"

"Thank you" Leappaw spoke. "I know Frondkit and Iceflower would want that"

She exited the nursery, her paws light. The memory of her sister would never be forgotten

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"You're a natural, Leappaw!"

Leappaw basked in pride at her mentor's praise. Redwhisker got into position behind her.

"Now watch what I do"

Leappaw watched, eyes intent on the tabby tom as he slowly crept forward, then lunged gracefully.

"Wow! Will *I* be able to do that?" Leappaw asked eagerly, her tail flicking restlessly.

"Of course!" Redwhisker purred, his whiskers twitching with amusement. "Now you try!"

Leappaw took a deep breath and slowly advanced, carefully placing her paws gently on the ground. As quick as a snake, she leapt forward but fell short. She hit the ground with a small squeak, wincing. *Oof! That was so embarrassing!*

"Aah, can you tell me what you did wrong there?" Redwhisker questioned, his head tilted.

Leappaw's mind went blank.

"Uuh, I didn't use enough power?"

"No, try again"

"I leapt too soon!"

"Not quite, I know you know"

"Oh! I didn't put my weight on my hind paws"

Her mentor nodded approvingly.

"Now that you know what you did wrong, you can have another try" he meowed.

Leappaw bunched her muscles and got into position, slowly shuffling forward. Once she was ready, she leapt fluidly using her hind legs, feeling the soft breeze tickle the fur at her belly as she soared through the air. *I did it!*

"Well done, Leappaw!" Redwhisker congratulated. "We should head

back to camp now, it's getting dark"

Leappaw nodded, her muscles sore from training.

"Also, I'll have a word with Oakstar to see if you and Flamepaw can come to tonight's gathering" Redwhisker exclaimed. "You've made great effort!"

Leappaw straightened up, no longer fatigued.

"Really? Thanks Redwhisker!" she purred and raced off towards the camp to tell her littermate the good news.

CHAPTER 3

Leappaw stood at the edge of the clearing, her fur bristling as she took in the strange new place. Tall trees ringed the open space, their branches swaying softly above a thick carpet of moss and stone. Moonlight spilled through the gaps, making everything glow silver and shadowy. The Great Rock loomed in the centre like a giant dark claw reaching into the sky. Cats from all the Clans moved around it, their scents mixing in the cold night air and making her head feel a little dizzy. Leappaw let out a small sigh, ears twitching as she tried to take it all in, feeling tiny in a place so wide and alive.

She flicked her gaze across the clearing and spotted her Clanmates weaving through the crowd, some already talking lowly with cats from other Clans. A couple of ShadowClan warriors brushed past a RiverClan group, their tails high and stiff, while a ThunderClan cat sat calmly nearby, watching everything with sharp amber eyes. Leappaw's whiskers twitched as she noticed apprentices from different Clans too, gathered in small clusters, stealing curious glances at each other like they weren't sure whether to speak or stay silent.

Her paws shifted uneasily on the ground. Part of her wanted to go over, to see what they were like up close, but her stomach twisted with nervousness every time she thought about it. So instead, she stayed where she was, half-hidden at the edge of the clearing, just watching.

"Wow, I never expected there to be these many cats at a gathering!" breathed Flamepaw. his tail twitching in awe, every bit as surprised as Leappaw herself was.

"You'll get used to it" sniffed Birchpaw. "After all, it's only your first gathering"

Leappaw's pelt bristled with annoyance. She opened her mouth to retort back, but was interrupted by a loud yowling. She tilted her

head towards the Great Rock, spotting an unfamiliar reddish tabby tom holding his tail high, signalling for silence.

"Let the gathering begin" he mewed, his voice carrying clear across the moonlit clearing. "I will begin"

"Who's that?" Leappaw hissed.

"That's Troutstar, leader of RiverClan, mouse brain!" Birchpaw replied, his whiskers twitching with frustration.

"RiverClan's prey is running well, our herb stocks are full and our warrior are stronger than ever" Troutstar mewed calmly, casting his gaze to the ShadowClan cats who seemed to shrink beneath their pelts, "We have two new warriors, Floatfur and Rapidwater"

"Floatfur! Rapidwater!"

Leappaw spotted the two sleek RiverClan warriors at the edge of the gathering, their pelts fluffed with pride. *That'll be me one day!* She thought, already excited.

Leappaw concentrated on the gathering, noticing that a small wiry she-cat was now speaking. *That must be Ryestar.* Leappaw barely paid attention to what the WindClan leader was saying. When was it Oakstar's turn? She huffed impatiently as a scrawny striped gray tom stood forward, which she guessed to be Stripetsar, the ShadowClan leader. Leappaw winced at the sight of his pelt. Through his matted fur, every rib was visible, and his legs looked bony. His eyes glistened with grief as he addressed the cats from all four clans.

"Pebblebloom, my former deputy has passed away" the ShadowClan leader meowed. "Darkwhisker is now ShadowClan's deputy"

He gestured towards a burly dark gray tom, who crouched beneath the Great Rock, his eyes slitted. Darkwhisker looked no different in thinness from his clanmate, but something about him made Leappaw's fur prickle with fear. The ShadowClan leader continued.

"Prey is running well and our cats are healthy"

As Stripestar announced his piece of news, several RiverClan warrior's pelts began bristling.

"Maybe it's because of the prey you've been taking from *our* territory" growled a dark brown RiverClan tom, his eyes narrowed in distrust as he glared at the rival clan.

At this, multiple ShadowClan cats stood up, their backs arched menacingly.

"Where's the proof?" hissed a skinny black and gray tabby, claws sliding out as she stepped forward.

"Stop"

An authorative voice rang across Fourtrees and the clamour began to die down. *Oakstar!*

"Gatherings are a time of peace" Oakstar mewed, eyeing the ShadowClan and RiverClan cats, his tail lashing. "ThunderClan will now share"

Leappaw's whiskers quivered and she bounced slightly on her paws, tail flicking with excitement.
"Greenleaf has fed our clan well. We also have three new apprentices, Flamepaw, Leappaw and Lilypaw" he declared, gazing proudly at his clan.

Leappaw's heart beat loudly as all four clans chanted her name, satisfaction rushing though her pelt. *This feels amazing!* She closed her eyes, letting the sound wash over her like waves. For a moment, she forgot about everything else—no doubts, no fear, just the steady rhythm of her name echoing through the clearing.

When she finally opened her eyes again, her paws tingled with excitement, like she could leap straight into the sky. Leappaw snapped awake, realising that cats were beginning to break up. The gathering must be ending. Leappaw shook ger pelt and followed her clanmates as they exited Fourtrees. She cast one last glance towards the Great Rock, which was illuminated by moonbeams that danced across the smooth silver surface. For a heartbeat, she wished she

could stay just a little longer.

But then the forest closed around her again—familiar scents, soft pawsteps, and the quiet hum of the night. She hurried after her Clan, her mind still buzzing with the echoes of her name, already replaying every moment of the Gathering over and over.

CHAPTER 4

"Redwhisker, choose a cat to patrol the ShadowClan border with Leappaw" Whiteleaf ordered.

Leappaw's ears pricked instantly.

Yes! Finally!

Her heart gave a little leap of excitement. Leappaw had been on hunting patrols and had explored ThunderClan's vast territory but had not yet been on a border patrol since she had been made apprentice.

Redwhisker gave a short nod, his gaze sweeping over the camp for a moment before flicking to two warriors. "Lavendertail, you're with us."

Leappaw could barely stay still as she dipped her head respectfully, her tail twitching with excitement.

Without waiting any longer, she bounded out of the camp entrance, the fresh forest air rushing over her pelt. Behind her, Redwhisker and Lavendertail followed at an easy, steady pace, their pawsteps soft against the earth.

The trees closed around them as they left the camp behind, and Leappaw's senses sharpened instantly—the scent of moss, damp soil, and distant prey filling her nose as they headed deeper into the forest.

"Now, Leappaw, can you tell me which direction is the ShadowClan border?" Redwhisker asked.

Leappaw slowed her pace and lifted her nose to the air, drawing in a deep breath. New scents tangled with the familiar, musty smell of ThunderClan woodland. She picked out the sharp scent of pine needles and damp bark underneath it all. That must be

ShadowClan.

She turned her head slightly, focusing. Her ears twitched as she followed the direction of the scent trail, her confidence building with every heartbeat.

"Over there," Leappaw announced, flicking her tail to her left.

"Good," Redwhisker purred, his eyes bright with approval. "That's where we'll be heading today."

Lavendertail nodded, her eyes dark.

"Our patrols have scented them on our territory" she snarled, her fluffy tail lashing furiously as she flexed her claws. "I'll shred them once I see them"

"Relax" Redwhisker laid his tail gently on the younger warrior's shoulder. "We're here to patrol, not fight"

Leappaw's pelt pricked nervously. What *if* they had to fight? The thought made her stomach twist. She shivered, her mind flashing with images of sharp claws and hissing cats, fur bristling in the dark forest.

She swallowed hard and forced her paws to keep moving, even though they suddenly felt heavier. The trees around her seemed to close in a little tighter, shadows stretching between the trunks like hidden shapes waiting to leap out.

Tension hung in the air as the patrol neared the ShadowClan border.

"I knew it!" Lavendertail hissed, her eyes narrowed to slits as she sniffed at a clump of ferns. "This place reeks of ShadowClan!"

Leappaw flexed her claws, trying to steady herself. The scent was stronger now—sharp, musky, and heavy in the air like it didn't belong anywhere near ThunderClan. Her whiskers twitched as she forced herself to focus, even though her heartbeat felt loud in her ears. From the looks of it, ShadowClan not only stole prey from RiverClan, but from ThunderClan too.

"They didn't even try to hide it!" Redwhisker growled, his eyes rounded with disgust.

An image of Stripestar's scrawny, matted pelt flashed in her mind.

"Perhaps they had a good reason to" she murmered.

Leappaw glanced along the invisible line between the Clans, half-expecting a ShadowClan cat to appear from the shadows at any moment.

Redwhisker shook his head in disbelief.

"ShadowClan has plenty of territory, and it's greenleaf" he grumbled, sliding our his claws and digging them into the soft earth beneath them.

"Redwhisker! Leappaw! Look at what I found!"

Lavendertail's voice rang out sharply across the trees.

Leappaw hurried over, her paws quickening as she reached Lavendertail at the edge of the Thunderpath. The warrior was standing stiff, her fur slightly bristled, staring down at something in the ground.

Leappaw followed her gaze—and stopped dead.

A large hole had been dug right into the Thunderpath, chunks of dark stone missing and scattered around it. Bright yellow tape was stretched and tangled around the edges, fluttering slightly in the breeze, marking it off like a warning.

Leappaw blinked, confused. She had never seen anything like it before. It looked wrong here, out of place in the quiet forest, like something had torn a piece of the ground away and humans had tried to seal it off again.

"I think it's another Twoleg construction" mewed Leappaw. "Maybe that's why ShadowClan's been hunting on our land"

Redwhisker's eyes lit with understanding.

"Perhaps Stripestar thought we wouldn't be able to scent them with this Twoleg reek" He spat the words out like it was crow-food, his eyes darkened.

Lavendertail snorted.

"ShadowClan was always mouse-brained" she growled. "No better than Twolegs themselves"

Leappaw nodded in agreement, narrowing her eyes at the Thunderpath that separated the two enemy clans.

Lavendertail gave one last uneasy glance at the strange hole before backing away. Leappaw hesitated for a heartbeat, her paws still tingling with curiosity, then quickly followed as Redwhisker turned and led the way back through the trees.

...

The forest felt different on the return journey—quieter, like even the birds were listening. Leappaw kept glancing back over her shoulder until the Thunderpath disappeared behind the trees.

When ThunderClan camp finally came into view, the familiar scents of prey, moss, and stone washed over her. Her shoulders relaxed a little, but her mind was still spinning.

Redwhisker didn't slow down as they entered camp. "Oakstar!" he called, striding straight toward the centre of the clearing, urgency in every step.

Leappaw hesitated for a moment, watching him go, but her thoughts quickly shifted. Her paws turned on their own as she headed toward the medicine den, her tail lifting slightly with excitement. She wanted to tell Lilypaw everything—the patrol, the border, and especially the strange hole in the Thunderpath.

"Leappaw!"

Leappaw straightened up at the sound of Lilypaw's voice.

She opened her mouth to speak but was interrupted by a loud yowl,

coming from the entrance of the camp.

"Thrushpaw!"

CHAPTER 5

Leappaw rushed out of the elders' den and skidded to a halt beside the commotion. She felt her eyes widen. Thrushpaw lay sprawled on his side, limbs slack and unmoving, his fur matted and dark with blood that seeped into the ground below. *What happened?* His chest rose in shallow, uneven breaths, each one a struggle, as Aspenlight crouched beside him, anxiously inspecting his wounds.

"What in StarClan happened?" the medicine cat asked, her eyes wide with worry.

"ShadowClan happened," Foxbramble growled, his tail lashing sharply. "He was chasing a weasel. That would've fed the Clan well."

The ginger warrior's voice cracked slightly as he stared down at his apprentice, like he couldn't quite believe what he was seeing. Aspenlight flicked her ears, signalling Fernspot to continue.

"Th-then ShadowClan came out of nowhere and attacked him," Fernspot whispered, her voice shaking. "They killed the weasel... and just ran off after."

A wave of horrified yowls rippled through the camp.

"Fox-hearts!" Leappaw hissed, her claws digging into the ground.

But her anger faded as her gaze landed on Thrushpaw again. He lay still now, completely limp, his body half-covered as Aspenlight worked quickly, pressing herbs into his torn flank and muzzle. The scent of blood was thick and heavy in the air, making Leappaw's stomach twist.

She swallowed hard and turned away, unable to look any longer. Her paws carried her on autopilot toward the apprentice den.

Inside, she dropped into her nest, the moss soft beneath her fur, though it did nothing to calm her racing thoughts. The camp

outside blurred into muffled noise, distant and unreal.

Leappaw closed her eyes.

And everything went dark.

...

"Wake up, sleepypaws!"

Leappaw slowly opened her eyes, blinking away sleep, immediately spotting Flamepaw trying to balance a wad of moss on his head like it was the most serious task in the forest.

"You look like a rabbit!" she blurted, fully awake now, whiskers twitching with laughter.

Flamepaw huffed. "Very funny."

"Come on, let's ask Whiteleaf if we can go hunting!" he meowed excitedly, bouncing on his paws.

"Absolutely not!"

Leappaw groaned as Redwhisker padded into the den, his tail tip flicking with annoyance.

"I reckon Vinewhisker and Amberfoot would be grateful if someone did their ticks," Owlbreeze added as she ducked inside, just back from patrol.

Leappaw flattened her ears but didn't argue. Flamepaw followed right behind her, grumbling under his breath, frustration practically radiating off his fur.

I wonder how Thrushpaw's doing...

It had only been a short while since Foxbramble and his patrol had stumbled into camp, but the image of it still sat heavy in her mind. Leappaw shook it off and slipped into the medicine den, eyes scanning quickly.

"Over here!"

Lilypaw bounded over, her eyes bright and lively like nothing in the world could dull them. Leappaw felt herself relax a little and leaned forward to touch noses with her friend.

"Redwhisker and Owlbreeze want us to do the elders' ticks," Flamepaw spat, tail lashing. "Do you have any mouse bile?"

Lilypaw's ears twitched, amused. Without a word, she turned and padded to the back of the den, returning with two neatly wrapped leaf bundles.

"Thanks, Lilypaw," Leappaw mewed warmly, taking one with a small sigh.

She snuck a glance at the other side of the den, detecting Thrushpaw's black and brown pelt curled in a comfy looking nest, his flanks rising up and down. He didn't seem to be bleeding, but his fur was still matted dark with dried blood, and his chest rose in weak, uneven breaths that made Leappaw's stomach twist.

A heavy, uneasy feeling settled in her paws as she stared at him, her ears flattening without her meaning to.

Leappaw shook her head and slipped out of the medicine den, immediately padding towards the elders' den. Flamepaw followed closely behind, his paws brushing the ground just behind hers as they walked.

She tried her best not to breathe in the sharp, bitter stink of mouse bile clinging to her fur, wrinkling her nose all the same. Flamepaw wasn't much better, his whiskers twitching in disgust as they moved side by side through camp.

"Greetings, youngsters!" Amberfoot rasped as Leappaw and her littermate settled down beside the elders, curling their tails neatly under them. Her whiskers twitched as his cloudy gaze settled on them, a knowing spark still hidden behind age-worn eyes.

Vinewhisker shuffled forward in his nest, giving a relieved flick of his ear as he spotted the mouse bile. He let out a low grumble of

approval.

"About time!" he purred, shaking his pelt and settling back with a huff.

Leappaw unwrapped her leaf, wincing at the sharp reek of the mouse bile.

Amberfoot purred with amusement.

""You youngsters must be bored stiff with all this waiting around," he rasped, tail flicking lazily. "I suppose I'll tell you two a story"

Leappaw's ears perked instantly.

Amberfoot shifted in his nest, his tail curling slowly as if he was pulling the memory right out of the air.

"So, there was a time when the Clans weren't as settled as they are now," she began, voice rough but steady. "Borders were ignored more often... and warriors were a lot less polite about it."

Flamepaw scoffed quietly, but leaned in anyway.

Amberfoot continued, eyes half-lidded like he was seeing it again. "I was just a young warrior then. Barely older than you two. And there was this argument over a hunting ground near the river"

Leappaw paused mid-lick, completely focused now.

"ShadowClan claimed it. ThunderClan claimed it. And neither side wanted to back down," she exclaimed. "So patrols started meeting face to face."

Vinewhisker let out a low huff. "Nothing good ever comes from that."

Amberfoot flicked her ear. "Exactly. But back then, no one listened."

Leappaw's tail twitched as she imagined it—fur flying, angry yowls, tension thick in the air like fog.

"So what happened?" Flamepaw asked before he could stop himself.

Amberfoot gave a slow blink. "Well... one night, both patrols showed up at the same time. In the dark. In silence."

Leappaw's whiskers lifted. That already sounded bad.

"And no one saw the badger until it was already between them."

A pause.

Even Vinewhisker went still.

Flamepaw's eyes widened. "A badger??"

Amberfoot nodded slowly. "Big one. Angry too. Probably just wanted everyone out of its territory."

Leappaw swallowed. "What did you do?"

Amberfoot let out a small, almost amused huff. "Ran. Everyone ran. Suddenly it didn't matter who owned what river anymore."

A beat of silence.

Then Vinewhisker snorted. "Smartest thing we ever did."

Amberfoot flicked her tail like she was offended, but her eyes were warm. "After that, the Clans agreed on proper borders. No more sneaking, no more ambushes."

Leappaw glanced down at the mouse bile in front of her, then back at Flamepaw.

Everything suddenly felt a lot bigger than just elders' ticks and patrol duties.

Flamepaw broke the silence first. "So basically... you all got scared straight by a giant angry fluffball?"

Amberfoot's whiskers twitched. "You could say that."

Leappaw let out a small laugh before she could stop it, the tension

in her chest easing just a little.

Outside the den, the camp still felt heavy.

But in here, for a moment, it almost didn't.

CHAPTER 6

Got it — third person, with Leappaw's protective thoughts still showing. Here's a cleaner version:

"Flashkit, stop stepping on my paws!" Softkit squealed, her grey fur puffing up in annoyance as she scrambled away.

Leappaw watched from the side of the nursery, a soft purr rumbling in her chest. The kits were loud and messy, but it was harmless play. Still, her gaze kept flicking back to them every few moments, just in case things got too rough.

"Leappaw?"

Her ear twitched. A small tug pulled at her tail.

She turned to see Frondkit standing there, looking up at her with wide tabby eyes.

"Why don't you play with your littermates?" Leappaw asked gently, nodding toward Flashkit and Softkit.

"I don't want to," Frondkit whispered. "I want to play with you and Flamepaw."

Leappaw's expression softened. A small ache of sympathy flickered in her chest. "Sorry, Frondkit. Flamepaw's out on patrol, and you're still too young to leave the nursery." She lowered her head slightly so she wasn't looming over the kit, and brushed Frondkit's shoulder with her tail.

Frondkit shuffled her paws. "But I'm bored..."

Before Leappaw could respond, Flashkit yowled across the nursery, "Hey, Frondkit! Come join us!"

Leappaw's eyes flicked over instantly, sharp for a heartbeat. The kits were fine—just roughhousing—but she still watched closely, alert

to every tumble and shove.

"Go on," she said, nudging Frondkit forward gently. "Just be careful, alright? No rough play."

Frondkit hesitated.

Leappaw's voice softened further. "And if anything feels too rough, come straight back to me."

The small kit nodded.

"Good," Leappaw said, though her gaze lingered on Frondkit for a moment longer than necessary. Only when the kit padded off did she allow herself to relax slightly, though her eyes still tracked the nursery as the game continued.

...

"What can you scent?" Redwhisker asked.

Leappaw lifted her muzzle and sniffed the air carefully. *Aha!* The warm, earthy scent of a vole drifted from a nearby fern frond. Excitement flickered through her as she flicked her tail toward the plant.

"Well done!" Redwhisker purred, his eyes shining with approval. Then he lowered his voice. "Now try to catch it."

Leappaw nodded and crept forward, placing each paw with care. She could feel Redwhisker's gaze fixed on her as she edged closer, careful not to rustle the undergrowth. Suddenly, the vole burst from the fern, spotted her, and let out a shrill squeak of alarm. Faster than a striking snake, Leappaw slammed a paw onto the prey before it could escape and quickly delivered the killing bite.

"Wow! That was amazing!" Redwhisker exclaimed. "You learn quickly!"

Leappaw dipped her head, trying not to let pride show too clearly on her face.

"We should head back now," Redwhisker meowed, glancing toward the darkening sky. "It's getting late."

Redwhisker picked up the blackbird he had caught and flicked his tail for Leappaw to follow. Grabbing the plump vole in her jaws, she bounded after him, excitement bubbling in her chest at the thought of showing her catch to Flamepaw and Iceflower.

As they walked beside the ShadowClan border, Leappaw spotted a ShadowClan warrior patrolling nearby. *Great StarClan... it looks like they haven't eaten in moons.*

The cat — Darkwhisker — looked even thinner than he had at the Gathering. His ribs jutted through his matted fur, and his legs trembled with every step. For a heartbeat, pity tugged at Leappaw's chest.

Then the image of Thrushpaw's torn body flashed into her mind.

Any Clan that attacks a helpless apprentice deserves what they get.

Her sympathy vanished at once. Casting one final glance toward the gaunt deputy, Leappaw hurried after Redwhisker.

...

"Have you seen ShadowClan?" Flamepaw mewed as he munched on his starling. "You'd think it's leaf-bare by how skinny they are!"

Leappaw nodded slowly, still uneasy from what she'd seen. The scrawny ShadowClan tom had looked wrong somehow—like the forest itself had stopped feeding him. But it didn't make sense. It was greenleaf. Everything was supposed to be thriving.

"It's the Twolegs," she murmured, more to herself than Flamepaw.

Her mind flashed back to the strange structure Lavendertail had found on patrol. Hard, cold, wrong. Leappaw shivered as the image sharpened in her head—the unnatural walls, the strange smells, the way the forest seemed to bend around it.

She shook her pelt hard, like she could shake the thought away

with it.

"I don't like it," Flamepaw added quietly, licking his paw. "Something feels off."

Leappaw didn't answer. She just stood up, suddenly tired, and padded toward the apprentices' den. Her paws felt heavy like stones after training.

"You don't understand!"

Leappaw jolted. Her fur puffed up before she even thought about it. That voice—Oakstar.

She hesitated, then peered toward the leader's den.

Oakstar was pacing back and forth, tail lashing, eyes wide and unfocused like he wasn't really seeing the den walls. His claws scraped the ground as he muttered to himself.

"I've barely any clues," he snarled suddenly, teeth bared. "It could be any cat!"

Leappaw froze.

What in StarClan is he talking about?

There was no one else in the den. No deputy. No warrior. Just Oakstar, arguing with empty air like it was answering back.

A cold feeling crawled up her spine.

She slowly backed away, forcing her paws to move even though they didn't want to. Something about this didn't feel like normal leader stress. It felt... wrong.

By the time she slipped into the apprentices' den, her thoughts were spinning too fast to catch. *What cat?* The familiar nest-smell didn't comfort her like usual. Instead, it felt tighter, like the air itself was closing in.

Outside, the camp sounds carried on like nothing had changed.

But Leappaw couldn't shake it.

Something bad was coming. And it already felt too close.

CHAPTER 7

Leappaw was helping sort the fresh-kill pile when Redwhisker padded toward her, his ginger tail brushing the ground behind him.

"Leappaw," he meowed. "I've got a task for you."

She glanced up curiously. "What is it?"

Redwhisker nodded toward the apprentices' den. "Birchpaw has his hunting assessment today. Whiteleaf wants another apprentice to go with him."

Leappaw's ears twitched. "Why me?"

"Because you're patient." Amusement flashed in his eyes. "Most of the time."

Leappaw snorted softly.

"And Birchpaw needs someone who won't argue with him every five heartbeats."

"Then you picked the wrong cat."

Redwhisker purred. "Too late now."

As if hearing his name, Birchpaw emerged from the apprentices' den carrying himself with his usual confident stride. His pale brown fur was slightly fluffed from sleep, though he still managed to look annoyingly self-assured.

"You're late," he informed Leappaw immediately.

Leappaw stared at him. "I wasn't even told about this until two seconds ago."

Birchpaw ignored that completely. "We should head toward the creek first. The prey's probably better there this morning."

Redwhisker hid a purr behind his whiskers. "Have fun."

Leappaw narrowed her eyes as Birchpaw headed for the camp entrance without waiting. "You know," she called after him, "usually the cat being assessed doesn't act like they're leading the patrol."

Birchpaw glanced back. "Someone has to keep us organized."

"You're impossible."

"And yet you're still coming."

Leappaw muttered something under her breath before following him out of camp.

The forest greeted them with cool leaf-fall air and the scent of damp earth. Birchpaw strode ahead confidently, his tail raised high as sunlight flickered across the path beneath the trees.

"You walk too loudly," Leappaw pointed out after a moment.

Birchpaw immediately slowed his pace. "Better?"

"A little."

"You could've just said yes."

Leappaw flicked her tail against his shoulder. "You asked."

Birchpaw let out a dramatic sigh. "This is why I should've gone alone."

"You would've scared away every mouse in the forest."

"At least they'd remember me."

Leappaw snorted with amusement despite herself. Birchpaw could be bossy, but not in a cruel way. Half the time it seemed like he genuinely thought he was helping everyone.

Suddenly he halted, nose twitching. "Mouse."

Leappaw scented the air too and caught it instantly. Fresh. Nearby.

Birchpaw lowered into a crouch, though his tail-tip twitched with nerves. Leappaw noticed it right away. For all his confidence, he clearly cared about passing this assessment.

"Relax your shoulders," she whispered. "You're too tense."

Birchpaw adjusted immediately. "Like this?"

"Better."

Carefully, he crept through the ferns one pawstep at a time. The mouse rustled beneath a bramble root ahead, unaware.

Leappaw held her breath.

Birchpaw sprang forward. Leaves exploded into the air as he landed heavily — but a heartbeat later he emerged with the mouse clamped proudly between his jaws.

His eyes shone. "See?" he meowed through fur. "Perfect technique."

"You landed like a falling tree branch."

"But I still caught it."

Leappaw couldn't argue with that. "Fair enough."

Birchpaw buried the mouse quickly, purring under his breath the entire time. His nervous scent had faded almost completely now, replaced with excitement.

When he finished, he glanced at Leappaw. "Alright. What next?"

She blinked. "You're asking me?"

"Well, obviously you know what you're doing." He said it so casually that Leappaw almost missed the genuine respect in his voice.

Almost.

Trying not to look too pleased, she flicked her tail toward the thicker part of the forest. "Come on, then. Let's see if you can catch

something without flattening the entire territory."

...

The Clan gathered beneath the Highrock as the sun dipped low across camp, painting the clearing in golden light. Cats pressed close together, pelts brushing as excited murmurs rippled through the crowd.

Leappaw sat near the front beside the other apprentices, her tail curled neatly over her paws. Across the clearing, Birchpaw stood stiffly near the Highrock, trying to look calm despite the nervous flicking of his tail-tip.

"He looks like he's about to faint," Leappaw whispered quietly.

Fkamepaw snorted with amusement.

Above them, Oakstar stepped forward, his dark brown fur glowing in the sunset light. Silence quickly swept over the clearing.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting!"

The Clan's voices died away completely.

Oakstar's gaze settled warmly on Birchpaw. "Birchpaw, please step forward."

Birchpaw obeyed immediately, though Leappaw noticed his shoulders tense beneath his fur.

"You have worked hard to learn the ways of a warrior," Oakstar meowed, his voice ringing clearly across camp. "You have shown determination, loyalty, and courage, and your mentor speaks highly of your progress."

Near the front of the crowd, Whiteleaf gave a proud nod.

Oakstar lifted his head. "By the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Birchpaw, from this moment on, you will be known as Birchwing."

Excited cheers burst around the clearing.

"Birchwing! Birchwing!"

Birchwing's amber eyes widened for a heartbeat before pride lit them completely. He touched noses with Oakstar, his chest puffed out so much Leappaw thought he might float into the trees.

She purred softly. *He actually did it.*

But as the Clan continued chanting, movement near the edge of the clearing caught her eye.

Thrushpaw sat outside the crowd near the elders' den, his body still flanked with scars. The apprentice watched his littermate with shining eyes, pride warming his expression — yet something else lingered there too. Something quieter. Sadder.

Wistfulness.

Leappaw's purr faded slightly.

Thrushpaw joined the cheering when Birchwing's name echoed across camp, but his voice sounded softer than the others'. Like part of him was somewhere far away.

Her chest tightened painfully.

Thrushpaw had once raced Birchpaw through camp every morning, always trying to prove he was faster. Now he could barely cross the clearing without help.

And while Birchpaw stood beneath the Highrock receiving his warrior name, Thrushpaw remained in the shadows, watching the future he should have shared slip further away.

For a moment, Birchwing glanced toward his brother.

His proud expression softened instantly.

Then, before the ceremony had even fully ended, Birchwing bounded down from the Highrock and pushed straight through the

crowd toward Thrushpaw.

"You saw that leap, right?" he asked excitedly, though his voice gentled as he reached him. "I nearly tripped over Oakstar's tail."

Thrushpaw let out a snort of laughter. "I noticed."

Leappaw watched as Birchwing settled beside his littermate without hesitation, pride still glowing in his eyes but no longer seeming quite as important as before.

And suddenly, the tightness in her chest eased — just a little.

CHAPTER 8

Leappaw stood among the apprentices one last time, her heart thudding hard in her chest. Her warrior assignment still replayed in her mind — especially the moment she had caught a weasel, fast and clean, even when it had nearly slipped away into the undergrowth. Iceflower had been so impressed she had called her over right after, tail high, saying she'd never seen an apprentice react that quickly in a real hunt before. Her mother's praise still warmed Leappaw's chest like fresh sun. She had done well. Really well. And now it felt like everything was leading to this moment.

Flamepaw stood nearby, practically vibrating with excitement while Owlbreeze watched him with calm, proud eyes. Thrushpaw sat a little apart with Foxbramble beside him, his gaze lifted toward Highrock with quiet hope. Leappaw caught herself thinking that if anyone deserved a moment like this, it was him — not just because he was strong, but because he never stopped trying, even when things got harder. Lilypaw sat beside the medicine den, eyes shining with pride for all three of them.

Oakstar stepped forward, his voice echoing through the clearing. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting!"

A hush fell instantly.

"Leappaw, Flamepaw, Thrushpaw, please step forward."

Leappaw's paws felt like stone as she stepped out with the others. Her breath caught as she stood shoulder to shoulder with them, Flamepaw barely able to stand still and Thrushpaw steady despite everything.

"You have trained hard and learned the ways of a warrior," Oakstar began, his gaze moving across them all. "You have faced challenges, shown courage, and proven your loyalty to this Clan."

Leappaw's mind flickered back to her assignment — the quiet forest, Birchwing's nervous excitement, the feeling of finally understanding how to lead instead of just follow. She had done well. Better than she ever thought she could.

Oakstar's voice rose again. "By the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names. Leappaw, from this moment on, you will be known as Leapfrost. Flamepaw, you will be known as Flamestreak. Thrushpaw..."

A pause. The whole camp seemed to lean in.

"...you will be known as Thrushlight."

The clearing erupted.

"Leapfrost! Flamestreak! Thrushlight!"

Leappaw — no, Leapfrost — felt something inside her snap into place, like she had been waiting for this her whole life without realising it. She touched noses with Oakstar, then stepped back, her chest tight with pride. Flamepaw looked like he might explode with joy, practically bouncing as Owlbreeze pressed close beside him, purring softly.

Thrushlight stood still for a heartbeat — then his eyes lit up. Foxbramble's proud expression softened as he leaned in close, murmuring something only Thrushlight could hear.

And then, slowly, Thrushlight lifted his head higher.

Leappaw watched as he stepped forward into the cheering Clan, no longer in the shadows. Lilypaw was already beaming at him, tail high with pride, like she'd been waiting for this moment longer than anyone.

For a second, Leapfrost forgot to breathe.

Then she joined the chant, her voice blending with the Clan as the names echoed through the trees — not just endings, but beginnings.

...

Leappaw padded out of the crowd once the chanting started to die down, her tail still held high from the ceremony. She barely got a moment to breathe before a small voice called her name.

"Leapfrost!"

She turned to see Frondpaw trotting over, eyes wide with excitement and nerves all mixed together. Her new apprentice scent was still fresh, like crushed leaves and morning air.

"You looked so calm up there," Frondpaw blurted out. "I think I'd faint if I had to stand in front of everyone like that."

Leapfrost snorted softly. "Trust me, I wasn't calm. I just didn't want to look like I was going to fall over."

Frondpaw let out a shaky laugh. "Still... you did really good. My mentor said you caught a weasel during your assignment! That's impossible!"

"It tried to make it impossible," Leapfrost corrected, flicking her tail. "I just didn't let it."

Frondpaw stared at her like she'd just said she could fly. "That's awesome."

Leapfrost felt her whiskers twitch with amusement. "You'll get there too. Just don't let your paws do all the talking before your brain catches up."

"I already do that," Frondpaw admitted honestly.

"Yeah, I noticed."

They both laughed, and for a moment the noise of the camp faded into the background. Frondpaw glanced back toward the apprentices' den, then back at her.

"Do you think I'll be good enough one day?" she asked quietly.

Leapfrost hesitated only a heartbeat. "Yeah," she said simply. "If you keep trying, you will be."

Cat Designs: (PART 1)

Leapfrost:

[image]

Lilypaw:

[image]

CHAPTER 9

Fourtrees was alive with voices.

The Great Oak stood like a silent watcher over the clearing, its huge branches stretching above the gathered Clans. Down below, the ground was packed with cats from every territory—fur brushing fur, scents mixing in a tense but familiar way that always came with gatherings.

Leaders spoke calmly from above, their voices drifting down like distant wind. Oakstar's steady tone carried ThunderClan's updates, while Ryestar replied from across the branches, her words careful but sharp. Troutstar was observing the clearing below, his eyes narrowed.

Leapfrost sat among ThunderClan with Flamestreak and Thrushlight, her tail curled neatly around her paws. It was her second gathering since becoming a warrior. Around them, apprentices shifted excitedly, warriors stood relaxed, and for the first time in a while, it almost felt like there were no tensions among the clans.

Flamestreak let out a breath. "This is actually... kind of boring."

Thrushlight huffed softly. "Good. Boring is good."

Leapfrost gave a small flick of her ear, glancing around the clearing. "Yeah, don't get used to it though."

Flamestreak rolled his eyes. "Always the pessimist."

"Wheres ShadowClan?" Troutstar hissed, "We're wasting moonlight waiting for those frog-chasers!"

The other leaders nodded.

"Let's start" Ryestar meowed, her whiskers twitching with impatience.

But even as he said it, there was a strange stillness at the edge of the forest. Not enough to notice at first. Just a gap in sound. A space where birds should've been calling—but weren't.

Ryestar was mid-sentence when it started.

"...and WindClan will—"

Rustle.

A faint sound from the trees.

Barely anything.

A few cats nearby shifted their ears.

Then silence again.

Oakstar continued speaking, unaware. "ThunderClan patrols will increase along the eastern border—"

Rustle.

Closer this time.

Leapfrost's fur prickled slightly. She lifted her head.

"Did you hear that?" she whispered.

Thrushlight had already gone still. "Yeah."

Flamestreak frowned. "Hear what?"

Rustle.

This time, it wasn't subtle anymore. It came in uneven bursts, like something—or *many things*—moving fast through the undergrowth.

The leaders paused mid-conversation.

Miststar tilted her head slightly. "What is that—"

And then the forest exploded.

ShadowClan erupted from the trees like a flood breaking a dam.

They didn't announce themselves. They didn't hesitate. They simply *hit*.

Dark bodies poured into the clearing, claws out, eyes wild and hollow with desperation. The calm of Fourtrees shattered instantly as screams rang out and cats scrambled backward in every direction.

"SHADOWCLAN!" someone yowled, but was cut off.

A ShadowClan warrior slammed into ThunderClan's edge, knocking two cats off their paws in one hit. Another leapt straight into the gathered Clans, snapping and striking without warning.

Leapfrost barely had time to react before Thrushlight shoved her sideways.

"MOVE!" he barked.

A ShadowClan cat streaked past where she had just been standing, sharp claws tearing through empty air.

Flamestreak was already in motion, fur flared. "You picked the wrong place to attack!"

But it wasn't just an attack.

It was chaos.

ShadowClan cats moved like they hadn't eaten properly in moons—too thin, too sharp, too fast. Their strikes were desperate, not controlled. Every movement screamed hunger.

Above them, Oakstar's voice cut through the noise. "CLANS—DEFEND YOURSELVES!"

But it was already too late for calm. Fourtrees had turned into a battlefield. And at the centre of it all, stepping out from the shadows with burning eyes and a broken snarl was Darkwhisker.

Darkwhisker stood in the middle of the commotion, his claws raised threateningly. His slitted gaze swept across Fourtrees like he was counting every breath, every cat, every chance. His voice cut through the noise.

"Enough!"

It wasn't loud because it needed to be. It was loud because it *had to be heard*. For a split second, even the fighting stuttered.

Not stopped.

Just... wavered.

Darkwhisker's chest rose fast, ribs showing through his matted fur. His claws dug into the dirt like he was holding himself upright more than anything else.

"We didn't come here for sport," he snarled. "We came because we are starving!"

That word hit harder than any claw.

A few cats hesitated.

Leapfrost felt it in her paws—like the whole clearing had shifted weight.

Thrushlight muttered, "They're really that bad..."

Flamestreak snapped back, "That doesn't make this okay!"

A ShadowClan warrior lunged again, breaking the moment, and chaos rushed back in like a wave.

But now it wasn't just blind panic. Now every cat knew. ShadowClan wasn't strong. They were desperate.

Leapfrost ducked under a swipe, heart hammering. "They're not fighting like warriors," she called to Thrushlight. "They're fighting like they've got nothing left!"

Thrushlight shoved a ShadowClan cat off him. "Because they don't!"

Nearby, a RiverClan warrior stumbled back, eyes wide. "They look half-starved!"

Flamestreak lashed out, forcing another attacker away. "So what—we just let them tear us apart?!"

"No!" Thrushlight snapped. "We survive this first!"

Above them, Oakstar had climbed onto a fallen log, trying to rally ThunderClan.

"FALL BACK TOGETHER!" he yowled. "DON'T LET THEM BREAK THE GROUPS!"

Ryestar was shouting orders too, her voice sharp and furious. Troutstar was already pulling RiverClan warriors into tighter formations, trying to push ShadowClan back toward the trees.

But Darkwhisker wasn't finished.

He sprang forward again, moving straight through the chaos like pain didn't matter. He slammed into a ThunderClan warrior and shoved them aside, snarling.

"YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!" he roared. "YOU ALL LIVE ON PLENTY WHILE WE SUFFER!"

Leapfrost froze for half a heartbeat.

Because up close—

She could see it. Not just hunger. Something else.

Something wrong in his eyes. Not just anger. Not just desperation. Like something had been driving them for longer than this moment.

Thrushlight suddenly grabbed her shoulder. "Leapfrost—look at their pelts!"

She glanced. And her stomach dropped.

There—on a ShadowClan warrior's fur—was a strange dull greyness. Almost like dust, but not from the forest. It clung in patches, especially around their legs and chests.

"It's not just hunger," Thrushlight said tightly. "Something's been affecting them."

Flamestreak dodged another attack. "Now is *really* not the time for mystery sickness!"

But even he sounded unsure. Darkwhisker let out another furious snarl and leapt again—but this time, his landing was sloppy. His paws skidded.

He was tired. Too tired. And for the first time, Leapfrost realised something terrifying. ShadowClan wasn't just losing control.

They were running out of time.